



"...meeting community needs...enhancing quality of life."

OFFICE OF THE MAYOR

Timothy M. Hanna

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February 4, 2010

Dear Senator Holperin and members of the Senate Committee on Transportation, Tourism, Forestry, and natural Resources:

I am writing in support of Senate Bill 205 relating to the authorization to create regional transit authorities in the State of Wisconsin. This issue is not only critical to the future of public transportation in the Fox Cities, but to transportation funding for transit systems across the State of Wisconsin.

Valley Transit is the public transit system serving the urbanized area of the Fox Cities and is owned and operated by the City of Appleton. Valley Transit operates fixed route bus service serving the Fox Cities Urbanized Area, contracts for shared ride taxi service in an area currently outside of the fixed route system, contracts for a connector service connecting employees with places of employment needing public transit service outside the normal operating hours of the fixed route service, and contracts with Outagamie County, Calumet County, and Winnebago County for ADA paratransit service. Funding for Valley Transit consists of Federal and State operating assistance along with property tax contributions from three counties, four cities, two villages, three towns, as well as grants from community partners in the Fox Cities Urbanized Area.

Despite the fact that Valley Transit is owned and operated by the City of Appleton, Valley Transit services, as well as funding for Valley Transit, make it truly a regional transit system. In recognition of this, the City of Appleton opened up membership on its Transit Commission to representatives of our funding partners over a decade ago.

However, today, funding for Valley Transit, the Fox Cities regional transit system, is in jeopardy.

Under federal law, once an urbanized area exceeds a population of 200,000 it no longer qualifies for federal operating assistance. It is estimated that the Fox Cities Urbanized Area reached this threshold in 2006, a fact that will be confirmed with the census in April of this year.

For Valley Transit, losing its federal operating assistance means a loss of up to \$1.5 million, or roughly 20% of Valley Transit's annual budget.

In recognition of these facts, in March 2006, Valley Transit and the City of Appleton along with

East Central Wisconsin Regional Planning Commission, our designated Metropolitan Planning Organization, convened a Fox Cities Regional Transit Authority study committee made up of Valley Transit's current funding partners, other local units of government, local non-profit agencies, as well as the Fox Cities Chamber of Commerce and other business stakeholders to explore the potential benefits of a Fox Cities Regional Transit Authority. Over the course of the ensuing two and a half years the study committee has not only expressed that the RTA concept would be a benefit in terms of planning, operations, and budgeting for Valley Transit, but also as a financial solution to the anticipated loss of federal operating assistance. Still today there remains widespread support for legislation authorizing the creation of a Fox Cities RTA. Since federal operating assistance for transit flows through the State of Wisconsin, if a bill authorizing the ability to create a RTA for the Fox Cities is not passed and signed by the Governor, every transit system in Tier II in the State of Wisconsin will see a dramatic decrease in funding by 2012. With property tax levy limits in place for counties and municipalities, these transit systems will look to the State to backfill that loss in federal funding. If the State chooses to hold other transit systems harmless and transfer the loss in federal funding to Valley Transit, without the ability to create a RTA to replace that loss of federal revenue Valley Transit will cease to be a viable regional public transit provider for the Fox Cities at a time when our constituents are becoming more demanding for economically and environmentally feasible transportation alternatives.

I had the privilege to serve on the Joint Legislative Council that crafted the legislation that is before you today and I am very proud of the work that the Council did. While I have laid out the specific situation facing Valley Transit, I know that some transit systems in Wisconsin face similar problems and some transit systems have completely different challenges. The beauty of the legislation before you today is that it was crafted in a way to provide enough flexibility for RTA's to be created to address the variety of issues faced by transit systems throughout the State, yet it has the kind of accountability that the citizens of Wisconsin deserve.

I'm asking you today to do the right thing not only for the Fox Cities, but for the State of Wisconsin. Nationally, Regional Transit Authorities are not a new concept. I wish I could say that supporting RTA's was a progressive idea in keeping with Wisconsin's rich heritage. However, Wisconsin is the only State in the Midwest that does not recognize public transit as a regional issue through enabling legislation supporting Regional Transit Authorities. Supporting RTA's is the right thing to do for the Fox Cities and for the State of Wisconsin.

If you should have any questions regarding Valley Transit or the study committee on the Fox Cities Regional Transit Authority, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Timothy M. Hanna
Mayor
City of Appleton

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TESTIMONY OF
GREG SEUBERT, TRANSIT DIRECTOR
METRO RIDE (WAUSAU)
BEFORE THE
SENATE TRANSPORTATION COMMITTEE
OF THE STATE OF WISCONSIN

%%%%%%%%%

STATE CAPITOL
MADISON, WISCONSIN
FEBRUARY 4, 2010



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Good Afternoon. My name is Greg Seubert. I am the Transit Director for Metro Ride. We provide public transit services in Wausau, Rothschild, Schofield and Weston, Wisconsin. Thank you for the opportunity to speak today.

Public transit systems in Wisconsin have provided area-wide services for many years. We have done so because people need to travel regionally to conduct their daily lives and their origins and destinations often lie on opposite sides of municipal boundaries.

Unfortunately, current Wisconsin statutes do not address public transit as a regional matter in most of the state. Our current funding and governance structures are not well suited for regional services. In the Wausau area, four local governments have partnered to create a patchwork of inter-municipal agreements that form Metro Ride. Each municipality has a vote on the transit commission. However, the transit commission is an advisory body with no funding authority. They cannot implement any policy that requires additional expenditures without the approval of each municipality's finance committee and common council or village board. Any one of these committees can derail any proposal. The arrangement is cumbersome at best and can be paralyzing at worst.

The State of Wisconsin has maintained a strong commitment to funding public transit services for many years. Unfortunately, over the past decade, the percentage of transit system operating costs covered by the state has declined dramatically and municipalities have been left to make up the difference. Municipalities have struggled in their response to this funding challenge, because during this same period, shared revenue payments have remained flat or have declined and state imposed levy limits have restricted the dedication of additional local revenues. Transit systems have had little choice but to cut transit services and implement significant passenger fare increases as a consequence. Transit systems have been unable to grow along with the communities they serve.

It is anticipated that the 2010 census will push Appleton and Green Bay urban areas over the 200,000 population threshold. They will lose federal operating assistance as a result. However, the loss of funding will not be limited to Appleton and Green Bay. Federal operating assistance is awarded to Wisconsin in a lump sum and distributed evenly to all transit systems of similar size, pursuant to state statute. When fewer federal dollars are awarded to Wisconsin because Green Bay and Appleton are no longer eligible, 23 transit systems in their funding tier will share the loss equally. Additionally, a number of transit systems are conduits for federal funding for county transportation programs, so the loss of federal operating assistance will impact our county transportation partners as well.

Municipalities will have few tools available to effectively respond to this loss in federal funding and transit systems will once again consider cutting service, raising passenger fares or both. Transit users already pay a significantly higher share of our operating expenses compared to users of other municipal services. Previous service cuts have disproportionately impacted the working poor, who rely on our services to move from public assistance to employment. I fear that some transit systems may not survive this next round of cuts and some of the most vulnerable of our citizens will be stranded with no transportation alternatives. The impact on local jobs and local economies will be significant.

Senate Bill 205 offers a viable solution to this critical funding dilemma. It would expand the RTA opportunity to all communities in Wisconsin and enable regions to establish the funding and governance structures necessary to maintain and enhance vital public transportation services. If the RTA opportunity remains limited to select few regions, local policy makers will wonder why the legislature created such an inequity.

We cannot afford to wait. The census has begun and a funding crisis is looming. I strongly urge you to support and pass Senate Bill 205.

CITY OF JANESVILLE



Wisconsin's Park Place

TESTIMONY OF DAVID J. MUMMA, TRANSIT DIRECTOR, CITY OF JANESVILLE, WI, IN SUPPORT OF SENATE BILL 205, REGIONAL TRANSIT AUTHORITIES

February 4, 2010

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee. My name is Dave Mumma, and for the past 30 years, I have been the Transit Director for the City of Janesville. Thank you for the opportunity to speak in favor of Senate Bill 205, which would enable the creation of Regional Transit Authorities by local governments throughout the state of Wisconsin.

The City of Janesville has been an early and continuing supporter of the establishment of Regional Transit Authority enabling legislation in Wisconsin. On June 11, 2007, the Janesville City Council unanimously passed Resolution 2007- 413, a copy of which has been furnished to the Committee, supporting the creation of Regional Transit Authorities in the state; and directing the City Administration to take all necessary actions to facilitate the Council's intent in passing the resolution. I am here today following that direction, as well as to lend my personal enthusiastic support for the passage of this legislation.

Janesville has long been a proponent of regional public transportation; going all the way back to 1977 when the first service outside the city limits was initiated to serve the newly-constructed campus of Blackhawk Technical College, located between Janesville and Beloit. Since 1987, the cities of Janesville and Beloit, and a public-private consortium that has grown to seven members, have sponsored and operated the "Beloit-Janesville Express", an intercity bus service between the two communities that in 2008 transported over 65,000 riders to jobs, job training, education, medical care and community services in and between both communities. Last year, the cities of Janesville, Milton and Whitewater and the University of Wisconsin-Whitewater jointly applied for and received a planning grant to study the expansion of public transit in the corridor between the three cities as well as within the City of Milton, which does not presently have public transit service. That study is nearly complete, and the first steps have already been taken toward bringing the service on-line as soon as the fall of 2010. We also recently completed the Rock County Commuter Transportation Study; that shows that more and more residents of our region are travelling outside of it for work, and that our current transportation system will not meet the future needs of this expanding portion of our population.

I wanted to give the Committee this background, in order to demonstrate that Janesville and other communities in Rock County and the South-Central Wisconsin region not only think that Regional Transit Authorities are a good idea for "someday" in the future; we're developing regional transit right now. I can also tell you that based on our over 22 years of experience in providing regional transit services, that if they are carefully planned and developed, provide convenient service when and where people want and need to go, that citizens will use them, and the public benefit is great.

Given this background, we in Janesville and Rock County were pleased when the Legislative Council decided to take-on the study of Regional Transit Authorities, and were happy to have several of "our own", including Senator Judy Robson of the 15th Senate District, City Manager Larry Arft of Beloit, and Mr. Richard Johnson of Janesville as members of that study committee. We followed the deliberations of the committee closely and were very pleased with the resulting bill that was developed by the committee, approved by the Legislative Council, and now is before this Committee for action and hopefully forwarding to the full Senate for passage.

SB-205 provides a blueprint that local governments anywhere in Wisconsin can use and follow should they desire to establish an RTA. It does not mandate the formation of RTA's in areas that don't want them. It allows local elected officials the latitude to craft an RTA that best serves the needs of their particular region, establishes parameters for governance of the RTA, permits those areas who so choose to hold a public referendum seeking approval to establish the RTA, and provides the RTA with the ability to levy a sales tax within it's operating area to pay the local share of costs for providing public transit service; removing those costs from the property tax. Finally, the bill addresses many operational and policy issues inherent in developing and operating a public transit system, and complying with the myriad of legal requirements inherent in these operations. The bill that you have before you is the product of nearly a year of diligent labor by dedicated individuals from all backgrounds, interests and sides of this issue, including three highly experienced, respected and knowledgeable public transit managers, who among other things ensured that the necessary elements were included so that the services provided by the RTA's that would be formed by the bill that you have before you will work in the "real world".

SB-205 has been carefully developed and well thought-through. It provides opportunities for public input to the process of forming RTA's at several levels, including local referenda if necessary. It will allow regions in Wisconsin to develop RTA's without the necessity of coming back to the Legislature for special legislation each and every time a local government or group of local governments

desires to form a mechanism for providing regional public transportation in their area.

On behalf of the City of Janesville, I strongly urge the Committee to carefully consider this bill; and then vote to send SB-205 to the full Senate for a vote. The future availability of quality, accessible and affordable public transportation to citizens across Wisconsin, and particular in Rock County, rides with this bill.

RESOLUTION NO. 2007-413

A resolution supporting the establishment of Regional Transit Authority (RTA) enabling legislation in the State of Wisconsin; and urging Rock County area State Legislators and Governor Doyle to support the passage and signing of Regional Transit Authority enabling legislation as proposed by the Wisconsin Alliance of Cities.

WHEREAS, the Wisconsin Alliance of Cities has proposed legislation to enable local governments to create Regional Transit Authorities; and

WHEREAS, Regional Transit Authorities would allow local governments to, either individually or in combination, coordinate and consolidate local transportation systems; and

WHEREAS, the proposed legislation allows elected local officials maximum flexibility to design transportation systems that meet the needs of businesses, workers and citizens in their jurisdiction; and

WHEREAS, elected local officials are given the authority to determine the governance, powers, duties, limitations, the methods of financing both the formation and operation of the RTA, and its boundaries; and


WHEREAS, the proposed legislation could provide local governments options for financing public transit systems if federal and state aids are reduced; and

WHEREAS, the Common Council hereby finds that adoption of the proposed legislation establishing Regional Transit Authorities will provide additional flexibility to finance public transit systems which will benefit the citizens of Janesville and Rock County and provide a necessary public service.


NOW THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED BY THE COMMON COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF JANESVILLE, WISCONSIN, that the Common Council of the City of Janesville support the proposed legislation which creates enabling legislation to create Regional Transit Authorities.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that the Common Council hereby authorize the City Manager and City Administration to proceed on forwarding this resolution to the appropriate state legislators and Governor Doyle and to take whatever further actions as may be determined necessary to facilitate this resolution.

ADOPTED: June 11, 2007

APPROVED: 
Steven E. Sheiffer, City Manager

ATTEST: 
Jean Ann Wulf, City Clerk-Treasurer

APPROVED AS TO FORM: 
City Attorney

Proposed by: Community Dev Department
Prepared by: Community Dev Department

Motion by: Steeber				
Second by: Williams				
Councilmember	Aye	Nay	Pass	Absent
Brunner	X			
DeGarmo	X			
Loasching				X
Steeber	X			
Truman	X			
Wellnitz	X			
Williams	X			

Testimony in Support of SB 205

Rod Clark, Director, Bureau of Transit, Local Roads, Railroads and Harbors, WisDOT
Senate Committee on Transportation, Tourism, Forestry and Natural Resources
February 4, 2010

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to appear this morning in support of SB205

I am Rod Clark, and I am Director of the Bureau of Transit, Local Roads, Railroads and Harbors with the Wisconsin Department of Transportation. I am here today on behalf of the department to support SB 205, a bill which would create a statewide legal framework and process to allow local governments in any area to create a Regional Transit Authority.

This carefully-crafted bill was the product of an exhaustive effort by the Legislative Council Special Committee on Regional Transportation Authority, during which a number of key issues were raised and discussed. The bill, in its final form, is a compromise on many of those issues but it does reflect the strong consensus of the Committee members in regard to what is needed to help local governments in Wisconsin address regional transportation challenges.

SB 205 would create a workable statewide process that would allow any group of local governments which so desires to create a Regional Transit Authority and would provide a new, dedicated local revenue option for all RTAs. Enabling legislation based on the Legislative Council draft bill but specific to the Madison, Eau Claire and Ashland/Bayfield regions was enacted as part of the biennial budget and those areas are beginning to take steps toward implementation. The budget also created a new SE Wisconsin RTA with authority specific to the KRM commuter rail project. This week, SB 511 was introduced, a bill which would create a process for establishing and, over time, consolidating RTAs in SE Wisconsin that could manage regional transit services and would have access to new, non-property tax local revenue sources.

Considering that when the Special Committee began its work in August of 2008 no enabling legislation existed and there was no consensus on what such legislation should look like, we have made very substantial progress in a relatively short period of time. But SB 205 is needed because there are even more areas around the state- like the Fox Valley, Green Bay, and La Crosse, as well as additional non-urban regions- that see the value in creating Regional Transit Authorities and deserve the ability to tackle the challenge if there is local support to do so. Establishing a single statewide process like that contained in SB 205 is the simplest and fairest way to allow those areas to move forward, just as Madison, Eau Claire, Ashland/Bayfield and Southeast Wisconsin have already been allowed to do.

On May 23, 2007, this Committee held a hearing which marked the beginning of growing legislative interest in the RTA issue. Secretary Busalacchi was invited to testify at that hearing and he made a strong case for why RTA enabling legislation was needed then. I would like to close by reiterating a few passages from his testimony that are just as relevant today:

- "... a Regional Transit Authority is a tool (for) local governments to use, if they choose, to develop, operate and fund certain kinds of transportation services that are most effectively addressed on a regional basis...
- ...In regard to most transportation issues ... in Wisconsin our plans, our policies and our programs are as efficient, effective and creative as any in the nation. But regarding this issue- ... our ability to address regional issues statewide- we are lagging...
- ...Mr. Chairman, there are a number of local governments who are willing and able to tackle the challenge of regional transit and it is time the state legislature gave them the authority they need to get on with the job."

Mr. Chairman and committee members- on behalf of the Secretary and the Department, I thank you.



John Muir Chapter

Sierra Club - John Muir Chapter
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Telephone: (608) 256-0565 Fax: (608) 256-4562
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Support SB 205, Statewide Authorization for Regional Transit Authorities Before the Senate Committee on Transportation, Tourism, Forestry & Natural Resources, 02/04/10, RM 330 SW, Shahla M. Werner, PhD, Director, Sierra Club- John Muir Chapter

The Sierra Club – John Muir Chapter strongly supports allowing local communities throughout Wisconsin to create Regional Transportation Authorities (RTAs) by local government resolution to promote regional cooperation on transportation. Far from a one size fits all solution, RTAs may include any mix of commuter rail, express and local bus service, park-and-ride facilities, shared-ride taxi and/or van services, paratransit and other specialized transit services.

The transportation sector accounts for 24% of our state's greenhouse gas emissions. It also contributes significantly to soot and smog pollution linked to asthma attacks and other respiratory diseases – especially for those who live near or utilize highly travelled roadways. Research shows that a person who uses public transportation over driving cuts their carbon dioxide emissions by over 20 pounds a day or 4,800 pounds per year. Investing in an RTA is a common-sense means of meeting reduction targets needed to help avoid the worst impacts of global warming and for helping protect public health, while stimulating the economy and creating jobs in the meantime.

Most other states already have RTAs or similar mechanisms that provide governance and financial stability for transit across municipal boundaries. They have used RTAs to vault ahead of Wisconsin in providing business-friendly, green, convenient transportation choices. Other states are also out-competing Wisconsin for federal transit funds, as evidenced by the fact that we have never received a federal New Starts grant. Under Wisconsin's cumbersome and antiquated rules, cities that provide transit must contract with one another and squeeze transit funding out of their general revenues, mainly from property taxes. The current system has left Milwaukee's bus service – once a model for successful transit across the nation – in a major funding crisis.

The 0.5% sales tax funding mechanism provided by an RTA would help diminish the need to continually raise fares, an outcome which has been shown to decrease ridership and reduce transportation options, especially for low-income families. Relying on sales tax for transit has several benefits, including raising nearly one third of revenues from out-of-region visitors, growing with a region's economy, reducing the burden on property taxes, and increasing with inflation.

RTAs would be a boon to Wisconsin's economy. They provide efficient systems that give employers better access to more, high quality workers, increase productivity and give workers better access to more jobs. They save working families thousands of dollars a year over the cost of owning, maintaining, insuring and parking a car. They reduce health care costs for those who live or work near roadways. They increase mobility for seniors and disabled individuals and better connect customers with businesses.

For these reasons, the Sierra Club-John Muir Chapter supports authorizing local communities to develop their own workable transit solutions that will attract businesses and protect our environment. Thank you for accepting our comments on this important matter. We urge you to pass SB 205 without weakening amendments.

Testimony to the Senate Committee on
Transportation, Tourism, Forestry, and Natural Resources
By Len Brandrup
Recently Retired Director of Transportation,
City of Kenosha, Kenosha, Wisconsin
February, 4, 2010

Mr. Chairman, members of the Committee:

I am here to support the legislation we helped to create as members of the Special Committee created by the Wisconsin Legislative Council on Regional Transportation Authority. That product is before you as Senate Bill 205 and before the Assembly as Assembly Bill 282.

This bill allows for creation of Regional Transit Authorities (RTA) across the State of Wisconsin where local support sees the need for such organizations. This bill is designed to provide a framework that will meet local needs to provide a comprehensive RTA with the ability to meet community needs in a broad range of settings, from large urban settings to the most rural areas of the State. We crafted the Legislation with the goal of providing that authority without mandating how that authority will be established and leave that issue to the local governing bodies that are establishing the RTA.

I served on the Interim RTA Board in SE Wisconsin created by the Legislature and was the appointee to that Board by the Mayor and Common Council of the City of Kenosha. I was one of the people nominated by that Board to serve on the legislative study committee that drafted this bill based on input from 21 others that included two State Senators, four State Representatives, and 16 public members. We heard from national experts on the subject and developed a bill that we felt best represented the ideas that should be articulated in such legislation to assure the RTA could function both today and tomorrow in providing a comprehensive public transportation system for the area creating the RTA. Having worked for an RTA in another State and having helped other communities create RTAs in a consulting role, I feel this legislation meets the needs of Wisconsin to

provide a framework for local jurisdictions to create an RTA that can function and provide the services they need.

This bill will allow local areas to integrate current transit services, as well as plan for future transit services for their local economies. It is about jobs and choice which will be vital to the State of Wisconsin so that their local economies can compete in tomorrow's world economy.

I know that the legislative process, working with local legislators, has created local RTAs for three areas of the State in the last year and that you will have before you bills for other areas of the State shortly. I will support those efforts also. Having said that, the bill before you today will allow those areas of the State not already addressing this issue with the legislature to create an RTA based on their local needs. I urge you to support Senate Bill 205.

Thank you for your time today.



Metro Transit

Chuck Kamp, Transit General Manager

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Testimony to the Senate Committee on
Transportation, Tourism, Forestry, and Natural Resources
By Chuck Kamp,
General Manager, Metro Transit, Madison
February 4, 2010

I am here today to support the legislation that is a product of the Special Committee of the Wisconsin Legislature on Regional Transportation Authorities formed in 2008, specifically Senate Bill 205 and Assembly Bill 282.

This bill allows for the creation of Regional Transit Authorities (RTA) across the state of Wisconsin where there is local support for such entities. The bill is designed to provide a range of potential public transportation services, to include bus, demand-response paratransit, shared-ride taxis, commuter rail, and other transit modes that will serve a regional community in a manner that that community needs and supports.

I was fortunate to have been nominated by Madison Mayor Dave Cieslewicz and selected to serve on this legislative study committee that drafted the bill based on input from 21 other members, including two state senators, four state representatives, and 16 public members including me. The committee heard from experts at the National Transit Institute, the American Public Transportation Association, the Federal Transit Administration, the Wisconsin Departments of Transportation and Revenue, and others. We had very good discussions about issues involving what kinds of transportation should be included, how the governing bodies should be structured, whether a referendum should be mandated at the state level or decided at the local level, how the service area jurisdiction should be identified, and more.

Because of the comprehensive and deliberative nature of this process, I believe the bill represents a broad consensus on how Wisconsin can best be served by Regional Transit Authorities. Our state will benefit from strong RTA's by getting people to jobs and improving regional economic development; meeting the needs of our growing older-adult population who seek choices in transportation to stay active in their communities; and getting students to school in a safe and convenient manner as they prepare to become contributing members to society. This bill will allow public transit systems to create logical boundaries that fit the regional economy and transportation patterns in communities across the state. In short, this bill is about improving transportation choices as Wisconsin moves forward into the new century.

Therefore, I would urge your support of Senate Bill 205 and Assembly Bill 282.

Thank you.

Co-testifying w/Chuck Kamp and Len Brandrup who were also Joint Legislative Council Committee Members:

Date: February 4, 2010

To: Senator Jim Holperin,
Chairman Senate Committee on Transportation, Tourism, Forestry, and Natural Resources
Committee members

From: Anita Gulotta-Connelly, Managing Director and President
Milwaukee County Transit System (MCTS)

Re: Testimony in support of 2009 Senate Bill 205, relating to the creation of regional transit authorities

Chairman Holperin and members of the Committee:

My name is Anita Gulotta-Connelly, and I serve as the Managing Director and President of the Milwaukee County Transit System. I also am the current Chair of the Wisconsin Urban and Rural Transit Association (WURTA). WURTA represents 28 urban and rural bus systems, 43 shared-ride taxi systems and 24 associate and affiliate members in the State of Wisconsin, and employs more than 2,900 transit workers statewide. Together those members provided over 75 million rides via public transportation in Wisconsin last year.

Per the recommendation of Milwaukee County Board Chairman Lee Holloway and with the support of the Joint Legislative Council, I had the privilege of serving on the Special Committee on Regional Transportation Authority. The product of our work on this Committee is Senate Bill 205, which you have before you.

You have before you today very important legislation. Believing RTAs deserved deliberate and serious attention, the Legislature established a Study Committee to prepare legislation. The Committee was made up of individuals close to the transit issues, as well as legislators from across the State and from both sides of the aisle. The Committee received testimony from transit experts, with both local and national perspectives. What you have before you is a well thought out piece of legislation that would allow the creation of RTAs in communities that desire to do so. The development of this legislation required a significant investment of time and thought. It is good legislation, and it should move forward.

Numerous communities are struggling to find the funding to continue to provide public transportation. The need for additional funding for MCTS is immediate and well documented, but this is not just a Milwaukee issue. Appleton and Green Bay urban areas will lose Federal transit operating assistance when the 2010 census is complete and this loss will impact all 23 mid-sized transit systems in Wisconsin in their funding tier. Even rural areas of Wisconsin have thousand of people who rely on publicly funded transportation options to provide people with access to various services through shared ride taxis and other programs.

As a nation and as a State, we have been very focused on jobs and job creation, but jobs without access are useless. In many communities, more than 50% of transit passengers use transit to go to work. If those public transportation services disappear, hundreds of thousands of people across the state will be left stranded.

The bill you have before you provides an important avenue to address these issues for several reasons:

1. It allows communities of various sizes the ability to tax themselves to support the continuation of public transportation if that is a priority for them.
2. It also allows communities, like Appleton and Wausau, where transit serves numerous political jurisdictions, to put in place a regional structure that allows funding to be generated in an area that mirrors the area that they serve.
3. It gives the State a unified framework for allowing RTA to be created without creating specific legislation for each area.

Southeastern Wisconsin is somewhat unique on this score, as it currently does have an RTA established to move forward the Kenosha-Racine-Milwaukee commuter rail, but that RTA does not have the authority to fully integrate and fund the existing public transportation systems into that structure. Senate Bill 511, introduced to this Committee on Tuesday, is a step in that direction, and allows for the creation of a .5% dedicated transit sales tax in Milwaukee County to support the operations of our local bus system in a manner largely consistent with the results of the November 2008 referendum.

This is a unique situation for the State legislature. No one is standing here asking you to give them more money. They are simply asking you for the ability to tax themselves to support the continuation of public transportation if that is a priority for them. Three Wisconsin Communities: Madison, Eau Claire and Ashland /Bayfield already have the ability to do this. There is no logical reason that the ability to do so should be limited to just these three areas.

Please support SB205.